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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [KDEM](#) [BN](#)
SUBJECT: BENIN: PRESIDENT KICKS OFF IMPLEMENTATION OF
PERMANENT COMPUTERIZED VOTER REGISTRY (LEPI)

REFs: A) COTONOU 00339 B) COTONOU 00186 C) COTONOU 00124
D) COTONOU 00802

11. (U) SUMMARY. On November 19, President Yayi inaugurated implementation of Benin's Permanent Computerized Voter Registry project (French: Liste Electorale Permanente Informatisee - LEPI) scheduled to start on November 23 with a National Extended Electoral Census (French: Recensement Electoral National Approfondi - RENA). In a nationally broadcast speech, the President called on political leaders and Beninese citizens to join forces in achieving a successful and efficient LEPI in the interest of transparent presidential and legislative elections in 2011. Opposition leaders still object to the way the LEPI is implemented, while the government and civil society have increased outreach efforts to build public support for the LEPI. END SUMMARY.

LEPI STARTS ON NOVEMBER 23

12. (U) President Yayi announced that an extended electoral census (RENA) will start countrywide on November 23 to implement the LEPI. The RENA will identify voters' locations through a Geographic Information System (GIS, carried by Global Positioning System - GPS) and a door-to-door extended census to register potential voters. According to Yayi, elections since 1991 have been marred with irregularities leading to contested results and a loss of credibility for Benin's electoral system. He stated his government's concern about the lack of reliability and the high cost associated with manual compilation of a voter registry performed for each election since the 60's. Yayi underscored that Benin needs a reliable electoral system to strengthen democracy. He called for political dialogue and tolerance to ensure peaceful implementation of the LEPI.

A COMPUTERIZED VOTER REGISTRY LIKE IN
SOUTH AFRICA AND GHANA

13. (U) The President said that Benin is not the first country to put in place a computerized voter registry, citing South Africa and Ghana as successful examples. He praised the efforts of the government, parliamentarians, and international donors on behalf of the LEPI. These include the legal framework provided by the government and the National Assembly, and financial and technical support pledged by donor countries and international organizations. (NOTE: The provisional budget for the LEPI amounts to approximately USD 32 million. Donor countries and international organizations that have already contributed to the "Basket Fund" include the European Union, UNDP, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Belgium. Other donors including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), France, Germany and Spain are expected to provide financial support soon. There is a financial gap of USD 12 million for which the government has no committed donors).

14. (U) Yayi said the LEPI will help strengthen and consolidate the

foundation of Benin's young democracy by modernizing voter registry management, improving electoral monitoring and reducing election-related public expenses. The president, therefore, urged citizens everywhere to participate actively in the implementation of the LEPI.

OPPOSITION LEADERS EXPRESS DISAGREEMENT
OVER THE LEPI

15. (U) During a joint opposition meeting on November 17, which was covered by the press, opposition leaders including Bruno Amoussou (Social Democrats-PSD), Adrien Houngbedji (Democratic Renewal Party-PRD), Antoine Idji Kolawole (African Movement for Democracy and Progress-MADEP), Lazare Sehoueto (Key Force Party) and Georges Bada (Renaissance of Benin (RB) Executive Secretary) decried that the LEPI's implementation was not transparent and that the government is trying to monopolize the process. They claimed that the government is designing a "tailor-made voter registry" to ensure Yayi's reelection in 2011. On November 23, Adrien Houngbedji (PRD), the fiercest opponent of the LEPI, called on the population to boycott the national census. A network of civil society organizations (French: Front des Organisations de la Societe Civile pour la LEPI - FORS-LEPI) has started extensive consultations with political parties and the government in order to secure consensus for the LEPI.

16. (SBU) Although the opposition sees the President's November 19 announcement as a response to its own critical November 17 statement, a government source told Post that the government has planned the LEPI roll-out long before that date. A source from the

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Netherlands Embassy (the lead donor) said that opposition leaders are frustrated because they are unable to control the LEPI as they wished. He underlined that the opposition has representatives in the Political Committee of Supervision (CPS), the body responsible for monitoring and supervising the LEPI.

17. (SBU) COMMENT. The opposition's hardening objections to the LEPI show that there is no broad-based political consensus, even though opposition deputies in the National Assembly have initially approved the LEPI. Financial and Technical Partners (FTPs) including Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, UNDP and the EU still believe that the LEPI will be ready for the 2011 presidential election. Post is exploring ways to support the implementation of the LEPI and to assure that its implementation is politically neutral. END COMMENT.

KNIGHT